

VZCZCXRO5013
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1140 3300715
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 260715Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6892
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0733
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4283
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7824
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5384
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1259
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1184
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001140

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE GENERALS PRIZE ORDER OVER LAW

Classified By: Political Officer Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Kyaw Zaw Naing, head of the Global Green Group, which received a small grant in 2007 from Embassy Rangoon, described his efforts to promote legal knowledge with free law clinics throughout the country. Basic legal knowledge, he explained, will empower citizens to protect themselves from unfair application of laws, many of which are written primarily for government benefit. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Poloff on November 21, Kyaw Zaw Naing, head of the Embassy-funded Global Green Group, described his efforts to increase citizens' legal knowledge in Burma. His program is in the process of starting five legal clinics in Mon and Rakhine States and Tanintharyi and Rangoon Divisions. The clinics will allow citizens to bring legal questions and concerns to community lawyers and leaders for pro-bono advice. Under the grant, Kyaw Zaw Naing has also developed a 2,000 page legal handbook that covers the basic laws in Burma and provides an excellent resource for people with relatively simple legal questions. He has also translated the U.S. Constitution and the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights into Burmese, and provided commentary for readers who have never encountered legal documents.

¶3. (C) Even in Burma, where the military rulers believe that "order is superior to law," basic legal knowledge provides citizens with significant protection for themselves and their assets, explained Kyaw Zaw Naing. For example, Burmese laws regulating marriages and the age of majority vary depending on a person's religion. Therefore, a seventeen-year-old might be permitted to marry under one religion and not under another where the majority age is eighteen. Government officials, aware that most people do not know their rights, commonly promote or prevent marriages illegally, depending on how they quote the law. A citizen who knows his rights under his specific religion will understand whether or not he is of age to marry, said Kyaw Zaw Naing.

¶4. (C) Legal education in Burma, and therefore legal knowledge throughout the populace, is almost nonexistent. Kyaw Zaw Naing explained that the study of law at the

university level only attracts mediocre students, the best preferring to study medicine. Furthermore, because the Attorney General's office has the sole power to write the laws under the senior generals' direction and because most citizen's believe themselves powerless to fight for their own rights, employment opportunities for law graduates remain limited.

15. (C) Comment: Kyaw Zaw Naing's project provides an invaluable tool for citizens in a country where the government considers their legal rights far less important than its desire to promote its own version of order. His grassroots level work helps give ordinary Burmese more tools to protect themselves and is helping to lay the foundation for the rule of law in a future democratic Burma. End Comment.
VILLAROSA